



## ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT

# Habitat Areas of Particular Concern January 2002

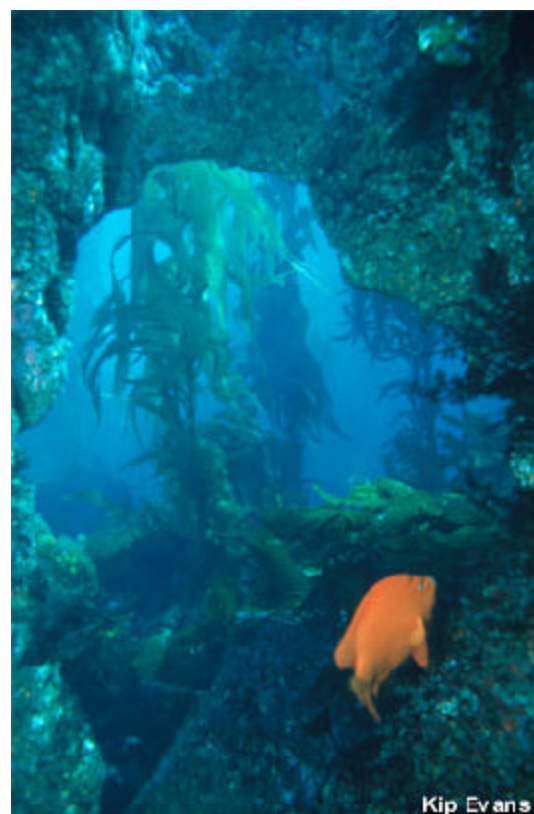
### *What are HAPCs?*

Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPCs) are discrete areas within essential fish habitat (EFH) that either play especially important ecological roles in the life cycles of federally managed fish species or are especially vulnerable to degradation from fishing or other human activities. The designation of HAPCs acknowledges cases where detailed information exists on ecological function and/or habitat vulnerability to highlight certain habitats as priority areas for conservation and management. The EFH regulations encourage the fishery management councils to identify HAPCs based on one or more of the following considerations:

1. Importance of ecological function provided by the habitat
2. Extent to which the habitat is sensitive to human-induced environmental degradation
3. Whether and to what extent development activities are, or will be, stressing the habitat type
4. Rarity of the habitat

### *Designation of HAPCs*

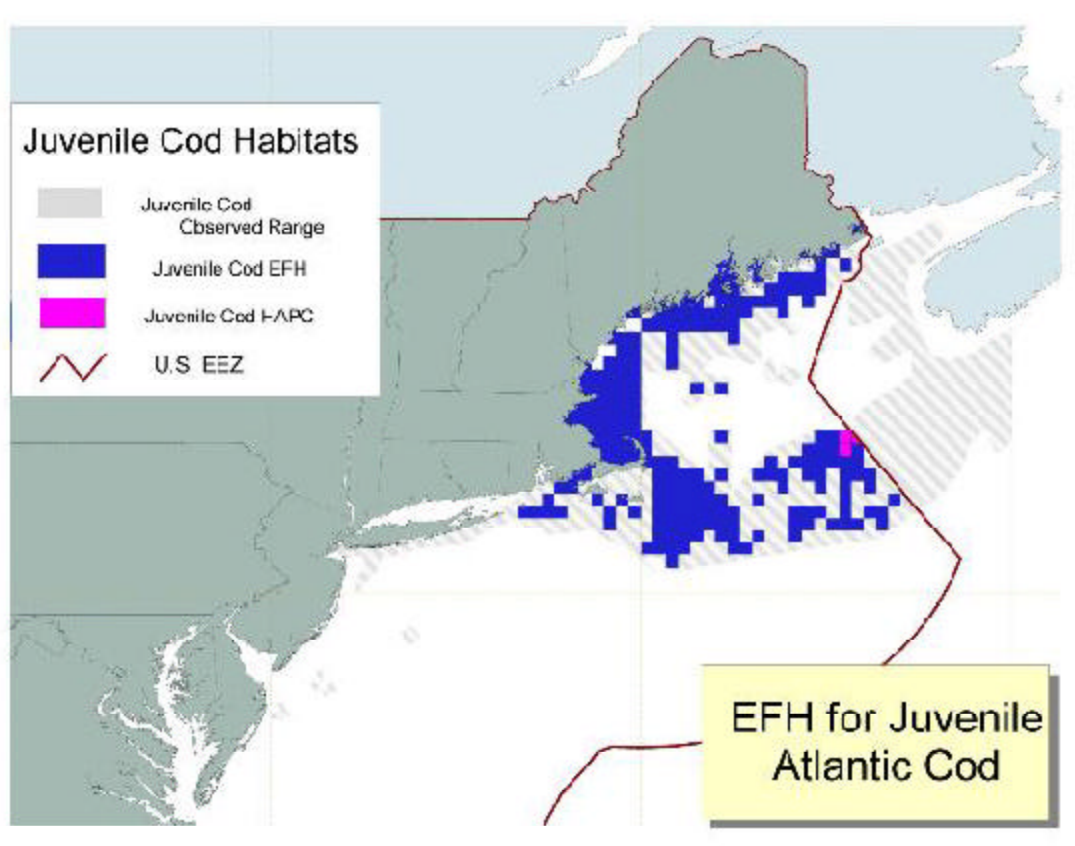
Seven of the eight fishery management councils and the Highly Migratory Species Division of NOAA Fisheries have designated HAPCs. The fishery management councils approached HAPC designation in different ways, some designating discrete geographic areas as HAPCs, while others designated all areas of a specific habitat type. As the fishery management councils continue to gain understanding of the life history characteristics of managed fish species and the specific habitat requirements of those species, they will be able to designate additional HAPCs or refine the existing designations.



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### *Example of an HAPC*

The figure below illustrates the New England Fishery Management Council's EFH and HAPC designations for juvenile Atlantic cod. The gray shaded area represents the observed range of juvenile Atlantic cod, based on trawl surveys. EFH for juvenile cod, shown in blue, covers 60 percent of the observed range and contains the highest densities of juvenile cod. The HAPC for juvenile cod is the area shown in pink. This small subset of EFH has a gravel/cobble substrate with thick colonies of sponges, which provide refuge from predators and increase the survival of juvenile cod. This type of bottom is also extremely vulnerable to disturbance from mobile fishing gear.



### *Why Not Focus Solely on HAPCs?*

Some observers have questioned the breadth of the mosaic of EFH designations for all federally managed species, and have suggested that HAPCs are the areas that should be considered EFH. HAPCs are identifiable, uniquely important areas necessary to support healthy stocks of fish throughout all of their life stages. However, healthy populations of fish require not only the relatively small habitats identified as HAPCs, but also other suitable areas that provide habitat functions that are necessary to support large numbers of fish, promoting sustainable fisheries and a healthy ecosystem. In total, HAPCs comprise only a fraction of 1 percent of the areas identified as EFH.

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